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Houghton, Marie and Tasker, Fiona (2021) LGBTQ* UK COVID-19 Experiences: preliminary results of the second survey. Working Paper. Birkbeck, University of London, London, UK. (Unpublished)

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LGBTQ* UK COVID-19 Experiences

**Preliminary results
of the second survey**

March 2021

**Marie Houghton & Fiona Tasker
Birkbeck, University of London**



LGBTQ* UK COVID-19 Experiences

Preliminary results of the second survey

Thanks for taking a look at this summary of the preliminary results of our second LGBTQ* UK COVID-19 Experiences survey. These results are based on a sample of 515 LGBTQ* people from across the UK. The data was collected between 23rd September and 22nd December 2020.

The findings we present highlight the continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns and restrictions on the UK LGBTQ* community. The impacts on mental health are particularly concerning, with more than half of participants saying that they had struggled with their mental health or well-being during the pandemic. Isolation and loneliness were a big problem for some participants.



However, for other participants this was a time of self-discovery and positive changes. Additionally, many participants, including disabled participants in particular, spoke about how the increased availability of services online had led to greater inclusion and support.

This survey forms part of a series of surveys and interview studies that we have planned in our international research project on LGBTQ* adults' experiences of the coronavirus pandemic and associated lockdowns and restrictions.

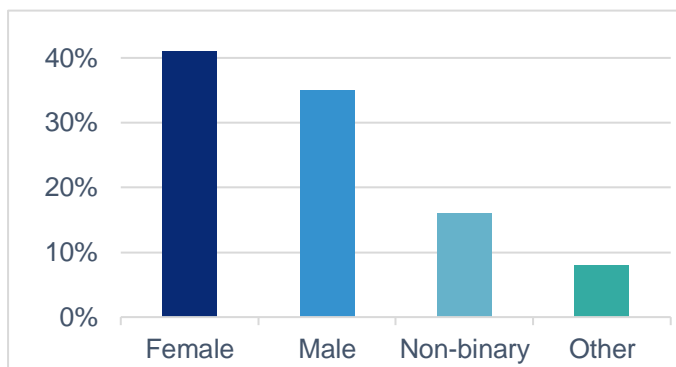
The results of our first survey, as well as further details about our international research project are available on our website:

lgbtq1835c19lockdown.wordpress.com

If you have any questions, would like to know more about the results, or would like to quote any of the material here, please do get in touch with us – Fiona Tasker (f.tasker@bbk.ac.uk) and Marie Houghton (mhough01@mail.bbk.ac.uk).

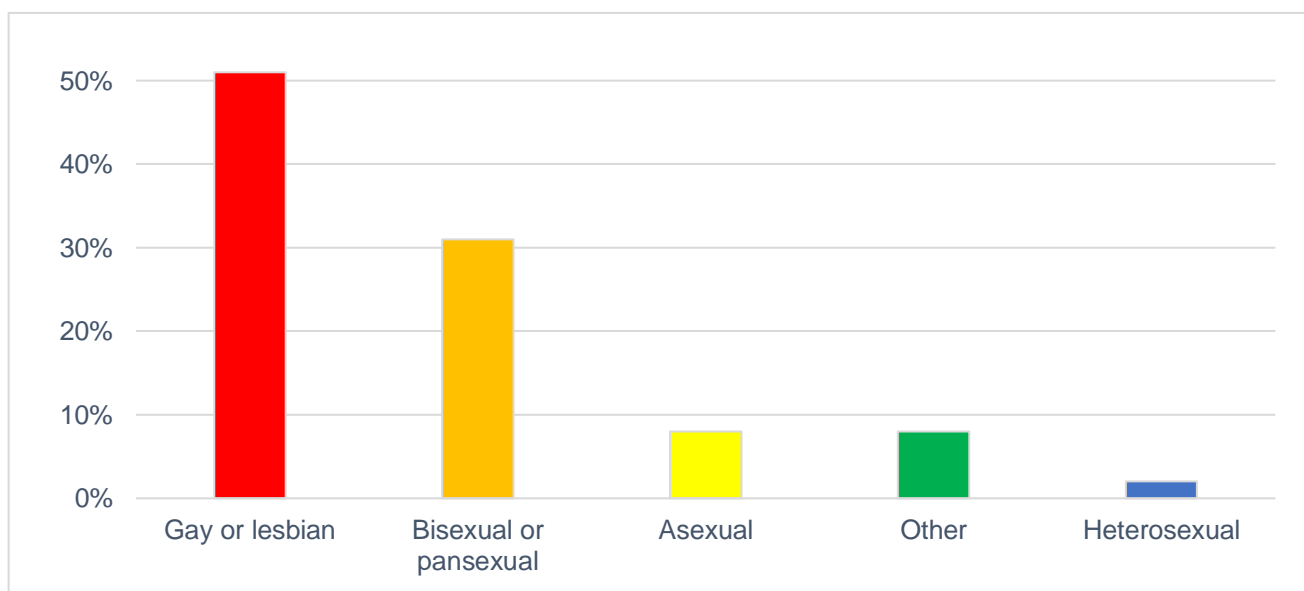
Who took part in the survey?

Gender. 41% of participants were female, 35% were male, 16% were non-binary, and 8% selected 'Other'. A small number of intersex participants took part in the survey, but this group comprised less than 1% of the sample.



Transgender. 27% of participants were transgender.

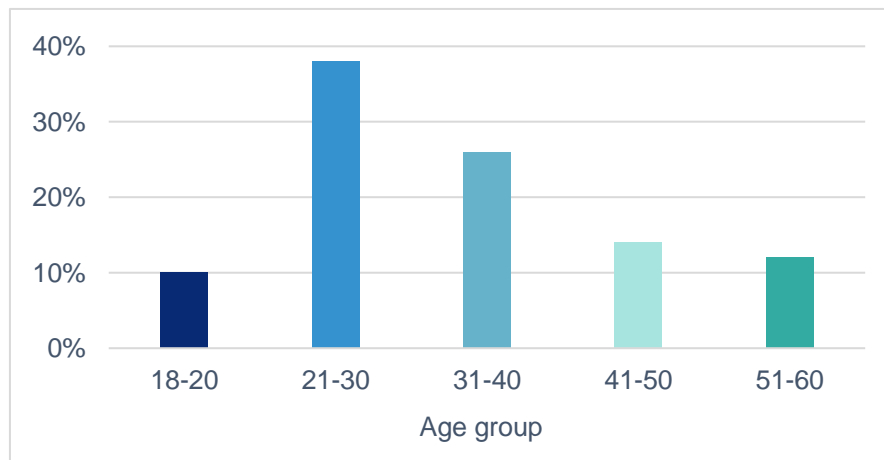
Sexual orientation. 51% of participants were gay or lesbian, 31% were bisexual or pansexual, 8% were asexual, and 2% were heterosexual. 8% of participants selected 'Other' and wrote their preferred term for their sexual orientation. The most common written response was Queer.



Ethnicity. 93% of participants identified themselves as white in response to our survey question.

Nationality. 89% of participants were British (or had dual-nationality that included British).

Age. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 60, with the average age being 34. 10% of participants were aged 18-20, 38% were 21-30, 26% were 31-40, 14% were 41-50, and 12% were aged 51-60.



Relationship status. 42% of participants reported that they were not in a relationship. 20% of participants were in a relationship but were not cohabiting. 38% of participants were cohabiting, married, or in a civil partnership.

Educational qualifications. 69% of participants had an undergraduate or postgraduate degree. 26% had achieved a further education qualification (such as an NVQ, apprenticeship, or A-levels). 4% had achieved GCSEs or equivalent school leaving certificate.

Disability or ongoing health problem. 58% of participants considered themselves to be disabled or to have an ongoing mental or physical health problem. Of those participants who were disabled or had an ongoing health problem, 96% reported that it affected their daily life at least to some extent.

Region and area of the UK. All participants were based in the UK and we had respondents from every region of the UK, although the majority of participants (87%) lived in England.

The most represented regions were Greater London (22%), followed by the North West, the South East, and Yorkshire and Humber each of which were home to 11% of participants. Northern Ireland was the region with the lowest number of participants with less than 1% of participants being based there.



Personal experience of COVID-19

At the time of our survey, 4% of participants reported that they had at some point received a positive diagnosis of COVID-19. In addition, a further 13% said they had experienced symptoms. Furthermore, 35% of participants reported having a family member or friend who had had COVID-19.

Impact of the pandemic

The results of this second survey suggest that people are, to some extent, adjusting to life in the “new normal” of social restrictions.

In our first survey (conducted June-August 2020), 72% of people said that the pandemic had very much affected or totally affected their life over the previous three weeks.

This time, only 20% of participants said that the pandemic had very much affected or totally affected their life over the last three weeks. However, life is still not back to normal – less than 2% of participants reported that the pandemic had not affected their life at all over the last three weeks.



In the current survey, 28% of participants reported that they had felt totally or extremely limited in carrying out their usual activities over the last three weeks due to the pandemic (compared to 69% of respondents in the first survey). However, the number of participants who reported not feeling limited at all was still very small (less than 2% of respondents in the first and second surveys).

Nearly all participants continued to be emotionally affected by the pandemic. Only 3% of participants in the current survey reported that the pandemic had not affected them emotionally at all over the last three weeks. 23% of participants reported feeling very emotionally affected.

Feelings of isolation

On the whole, participants reported lower levels of isolation in the current survey, compared to our first survey conducted in the summer of 2020. However, some respondents remained very isolated. In particular, respondents were more likely to report feeling isolated from LGBTQ* friends than from heterosexual or cisgender friends.

26% of participants reported feeling very or extremely isolated from their LGBTQ* friends, compared to 15% who reported feeling very or extremely isolated from heterosexual or cisgender friends.

Furthermore, 13% of participants in relationships reported feeling very or extremely isolated from their partner(s).

“I haven’t been able to express myself fully around my hetero roommates even though they accept me. I am really missing queer spaces and the ability to connect with other LGBTQ+ people. The pandemic also isolated me from a partner I was seeing and it has ended the relationship.”

(Survey participant)

While some participants were very positive about the possibilities that video calls offered to help them stay connected to LGBTQ* friends, others struggled due to video calls leading to feelings of anxiety or dysphoria.

“I feel isolated from the LGBTQ community since lockdown started. Zoom and video calling just doesn't work for me at all and makes me very dysphoric about my appearance and how I sound.”

(Survey participant)

Problems caused by the pandemic

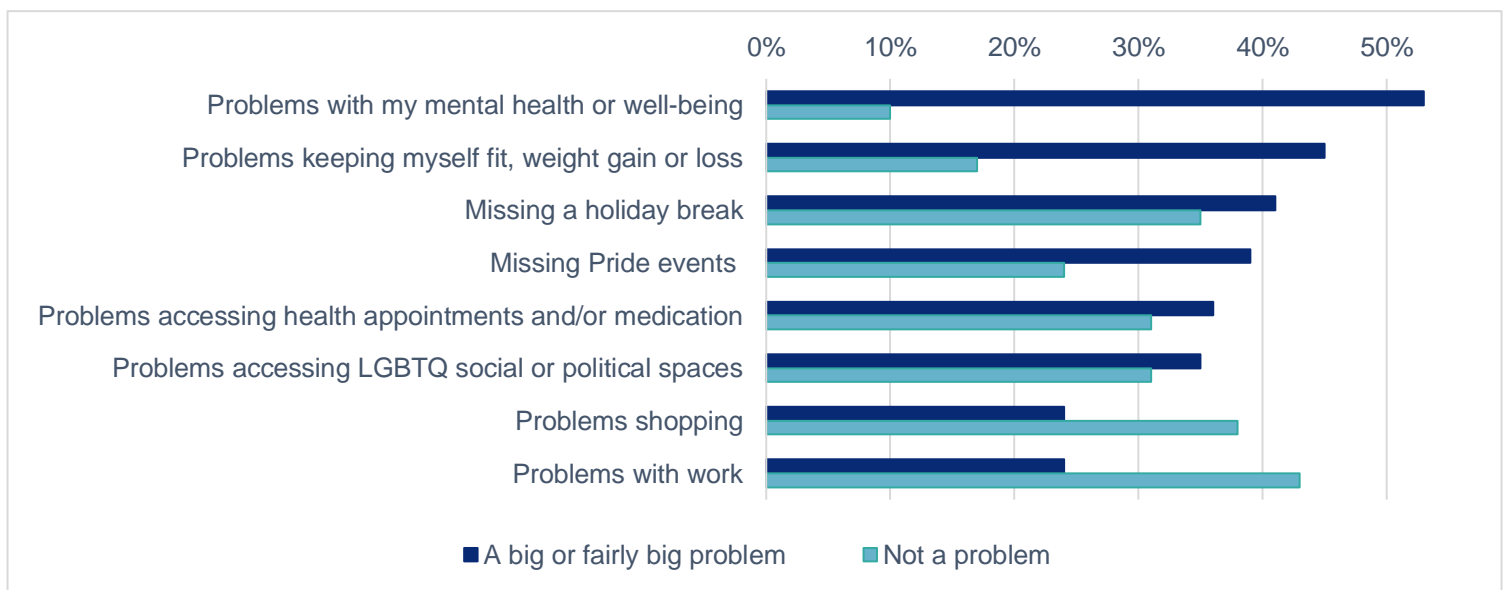
A new addition to our second survey was a section asking people about problems and positives they had experienced due to the pandemic.

The issue that was most frequently identified by participants as having been a problem for them was problems with mental health or well-being. Indeed, 53% of participants reported that this was a big or fairly big problem for them, compared to only 10% who said this had not been a problem for them. Written responses from participants showed that the pandemic had led to increased anxiety and depression for many participants, which was variously seen as due to isolation, stress, uncertainty about the future, or a mix of all these factors.

“Definitely more lonely as I often go weeks between seeing people, which makes me depressed and anxious.”

(Survey participant)

Problems keeping fit or with weight gain/loss were identified as a big or fairly big problem by 45% of participants. Furthermore, 41% of participants reported that missing a holiday break was a big or fairly big problem for them and 39% reported that missing Pride events had been a big or fairly big problem.



Positives that have come out of the pandemic

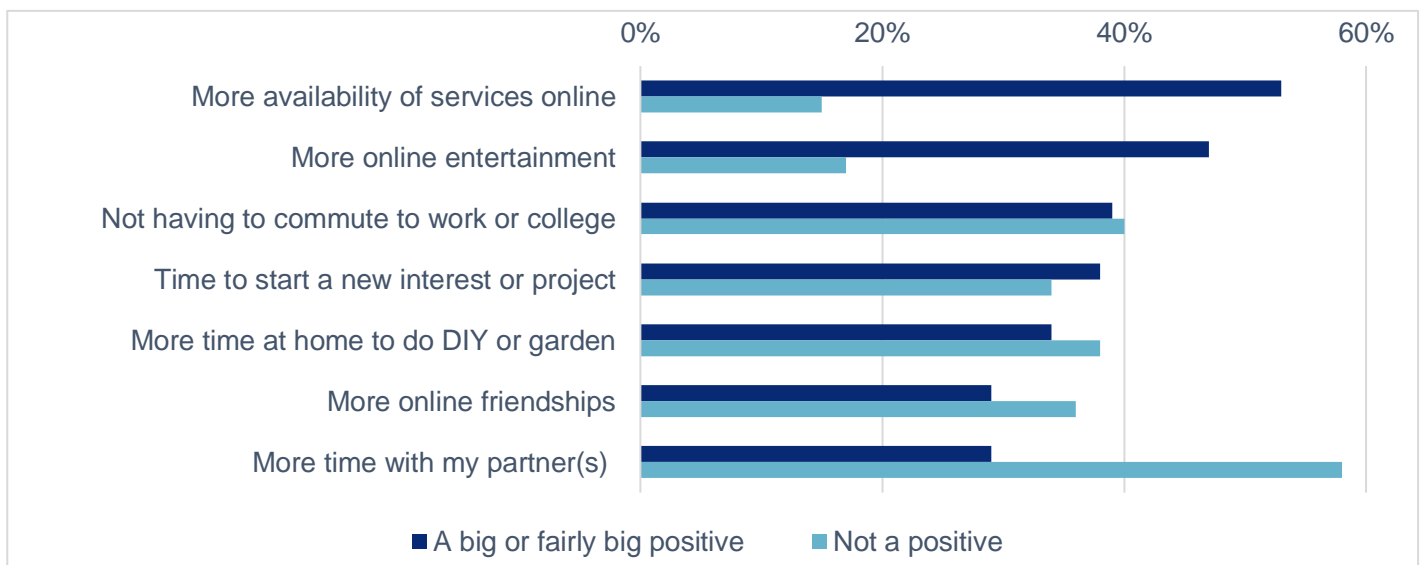
The most frequently identified positive to have come out of the pandemic was the increased availability of services online. This was something that 53% of participants felt had been a big or fairly big positive, compared to only 15% who felt this had not been a positive.

Participants spoke about now being able to attend support groups or engage in social activities that had previously not been available to them due to location. The shift to online had also made a big difference in terms of accessibility and inclusion for some participants with disabilities or long-term health conditions.

“As someone with chronic fatigue, the increase in online services has been a boon.”

(Survey participant)

47% of participants felt that more online entertainment was a big or fairly big positive. In addition, 39% of participants reported that not having to commute to work or college had been a big or fairly big positive, and 38% said that having time to start a new interest or project and increased feeling of creativity had been a big or fairly big positive that had come out of the current situation.



Thanks and future research

Firstly, we would like to offer our thanks to everyone who participated in the survey. We are so grateful for the time and thought you put into taking part.

We are grateful also to all the organisations who helped in publicising the survey and to those who offered feedback on the draft of the survey. We would also like to thank the British Academy for the funding which has made this project possible.

We have a future third survey and as well as an interview study planned. For more information about our research project, the results we have found so far and our future plans, do please visit our website:

lgbtq1835c19lockdown.wordpress.com

We hope that you have found this summary of our initial findings useful. The results highlight the many and varied experiences of the UK LGBTQ* community at this time. Some of the findings, especially around mental health, are concerning. However, while the survey highlighted experiences of vulnerability and isolation, it also highlighted experiences of resilience and support. This gives us hope for the future.



Please do get in touch with us – Fiona Tasker (f.tasker@bbk.ac.uk) and Marie Houghton (mhough01@mail.bbk.ac.uk) – if you have any questions, would like to know more about the results, or would like to quote any of the material here.

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Citation:

Houghton, M., & Tasker, F. (2021). *LGBTQ* UK COVID-19 experiences: Preliminary results of the second survey*. Released 20.iii.2021. Working Paper. Department of Psychological Sciences, Birkbeck, University of London.
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Funded by British Academy Special Research Grants: Covid-19 COV19\201169
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